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What makes Slavery a Question of National Concern?

A

LECTURE,

DELIVERED, BY INVITATION,

AT NEW YORK, JANUARY 30,

AND

AT SYRACUSE, FEBRUARY 1,

1855.

BY CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

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LECTURE.

Gentlemen and Ladies, —

For the views I propose to submit upon the most momentous question of the age, I solicit at the outset no more of your favor than a patient hearing. Conscious of an utter inability to subject my judgments to the test of any accepted standard among my fellow-citizens, I can only promise that they shall issue from sincere conviction, unbiassed by temporary passion or unworthy motive. Unconnected with existing associations to oppose slavery, it is not my design to assume the championship of any, whilst it is my wish to speak of all with respect, and yet with freedom. Above all, I trust that, in nothing which I say to-night, I may be found to transgress the strict line of courtesy which is due to all men honestly entertaining opinions differing from mine. It is unfortunate that so much violence should have entered into the spirit of this struggle from the beginning. I know not whether it could have been avoided; for, in questions strongly enlisting the passions of men, some of the disputants will inevitably exaggerate, and many will fall into extravagance. This breeds menace, denunciation, and crimination of all sorts; from the effects of which the best side is sure to suffer more than the worst. I cannot think

that the right or the wrong of slavery will ever be rendered more clear by invective, any more than that the very natural emotions created by a sense of human oppression can alone be trusted as a guide to decisions in great affairs. The value of such weapons in this contest is at best but limited. When used to excess, they effect a substitution of incidental altercations for the real issue, as little likely to determine that, as the great question of the balance of power among the nations of Europe, now in agitation, would be likely to be set at rest by the occurrence of a few private duels among the combatants in the Crimea. Neither is this all the harm they do. The slanders which they breed fill the public mind with myriads of prejudices and prepossessions that remain as barriers to the progress of truth, long after the fallacies in which they originate have been exploded. So, too, the indulgence in sentiments of a noble and refined character will not answer, in the place of principles, for the resolution of problems that puzzle the most sagacious statesmen. Whilst I fully understand the value of this resource to a speaker in my situation to-night, as a means of carrying his hearers along with him to his end, I propose scrupulously to deny myself all access to it. I could, with the greatest ease, fill my allotted time with periods sufficiently rounded to catch your applause; but what end should I serve by it, excepting to recommend my elocution? It would not touch the true points of difficulty which are embraced in the two questions, *What makes the slave-question of national concern in America?* and *How is it to be treated on the part of the people of the free states.* To the examination of these do I propose with your leave to devote the present evening.

In order to aid in the explanation of this matter, let me, first of all, begin logically by laying my premises. Domestic slavery is established in at least fifteen out of thirty-one of the states of this Union. This fact is beyond dispute. The number of human beings held in slavery now exceeds three millions of souls, being more than the sum of the

whole of the population of the thirteen original states at the breaking out of the Revolutionary War, eighty years ago. This fact will scarcely be denied. Now, if these two postulates are conceded to me, it follows, that, by pushing the calculation of increase — which is found correct for the eighty years that are past — to the eighty years that are to come, without permitting the introduction of any unusual or extraordinary causes to accelerate or retard the natural progress of population, we arrive at the conclusion that the number of slaves may then exceed the whole of the population of all descriptions now embraced within the limits of the thirty-one states, — that is, five or six and twenty millions of souls, or thereabouts (for, to my immediate purpose, precise accuracy in numbers is not material).

Now, without going into any more distant futurity, let us stop to think of twenty-six millions of men, women, and children, held as slaves in the heart of a nation composed of a number of communities, separate for certain purposes, but indissolubly united for others. Can it be maintained for a moment, that, in the prospect of an experiment like this, without example among modern nations, the unavoidable relations of all of us to such an agglomerating mass are not a fit and legitimate subject of anxious consideration, no matter where we may be geographically situated?

In proposing this question, I deal in no sentiment, but in hard matter of fact. I know very well the answer which is most commonly given, and that in highly respectable quarters, whenever the subject is alluded to. It is said that slavery is exclusively the concern of those states within which it is established; that we who live outside have nothing whatever to do with it; and that all our attempts to interfere will only make a bad matter worse. This reply has done much to quiet the consciences of many honest men, who seek to excuse themselves from considering the subject at all. But, in the mind of any sagacious statesman who looks to the future of this nation, what can be its value? Is it *true* that

the increase in the Union of a prodigious number of human beings kept in slavery, without education or morals, without discretion or responsibility, no matter how bounded by conventional lines, is going to produce effects upon the character, the interests, the moral and material concerns, of *only* one portion of that Union? I think this question cannot be conscientiously answered in the affirmative, even upon the general view, much less when I consider that the men most deeply interested, and most directly affected by their relations to this mass, — those, I mean, who hold the slaves, — are likewise men whose public action has a bearing as direct upon the decision of all national questions in which we are involved for good or for evil, as our own. And even in the other view of the case, if it be insisted that the affirmative is the correct answer, it seems to me to be susceptible of doubt in honest and candid minds, at least so far as to acquit all those of us from just reproach who decide to act upon a different conclusion.

If, then, I am asked the question, What makes the slave-question of national concern in America? I answer at once, and with perfect confidence, *Overpowering necessity.* It has been quite usual among a large class of citizens, whose prejudices I cannot despise (for they are honestly held), to charge individuals with wantonly and maliciously, and for their own selfish ends, exciting this controversy. This impression has the same source which I have already pointed out. But slavery is here. It is not a stationary matter. It goes on developing itself, more and more, from day to day. This is a free country. If gentlemen who pride themselves for their practical talent choose to shut their eyes, and then say they do not see the progress of slavery, — if, because they do not thus see it, they expect that everybody else should follow their example, — I ask, is this course deserving to be called practical? Is it not quite as visionary as any thing they lay to the account of the men they call fanatical? How long can such voluntary blindness be expected to last? If four

millions of slaves can be neglected, will the task of observation begin when they have become, as they surely will, twelve, and twenty-four, and forty-eight, and a hundred and fifty millions? It must begin somewhere. The precise point of time is not material. But if this be once granted, that our duty to make slavery a question of national concern must begin some time or other, what matters it when this happens, or who first entered upon the discussion? So far, then, from laying the stress which many have done upon the action of this or that class of individuals in commencing agitation, and denominating them traitors and incendiaries designing the ruin of the country, I cannot resist the conviction that they simply played the part which had become inevitable in America. The day had arrived, in the course of God's providence, when slavery had become a national concern. And all the elaborate combinations that were devised to check the discussion at the outset, even had they been strictly confined within justifiable limits, could have no other issue than to accelerate that result much more rapidly than if it had been left to itself.

For it should never be forgotten, in a philosophical view of the subject, that its substance is not of merely local or temporary nature, like the staples of ordinary politics. Neither is it a mere bubble for the sport of common demagogues in their daily play upon the popular passions. It has both a deep root and wide-spread branches. The root stretches far down into the Christian faith; the branches spread widely over all democratic institutions. When the Saviour of the race described himself as the sower who went out to sow, he predicted the fate of much of his seed, — that some would fall by the wayside, some on rocks, some on thorns; but yet that a portion would reach congenial soil, from which, sooner or later, would spring up plants to yield fruit, perhaps a hundred-fold. This truth has now received a verification of two thousand years. The interests and the passions, the coldness and the warmth, the weakness and the

corruption, incident to men, have ever mingled with his pure precepts, — sometimes to choke, oftener to wither, and occasionally to transform, their true nature; but they have never yet availed entirely to destroy their reproductive force. Changed, perverted, postponed, they have often been, — exterminated, never. In a moment the least expected, in a spot the most unlooked for, some small and feeble germ will push itself forth to the air, which, receiving only the more vigor from the storms which would seem likely to eradicate it, presently shoots up into a stately stem, —

> "To equal which the tallest pine
> Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
> Of some great ammiral, were but a wand."

Thus it happened, that, during the brief progress of the inspired Sower on earth, he sowed broadcast the seed, the thousandth part of which, even to this day, has not borne its full measure of promised fruit. Up to the hour of his advent, the full relation of man to his fellows had never been clearly recognized in the moral systems of the most refined and civilized nations. The right of the strongest, established by universal custom, hardened itself into law, susceptible of mitigation according to the circumstances of the weak. War acknowledged no rule for the victor but his pleasure. If he spared the life of his fallen enemy, he could do so from natural generosity, or he might be tempted to it by baser motives. He could bargain it away for a price in money, or in personal service for months or years, for life, or for the lives of unborn generations. Hence sprung slavery. Hence came the subjection of the feeble throughout the world, and the establishment of habits and customs which justified the wrong by weaving into the framework of government the authority which prescription makes. Suddenly, in the obscurity of Judea, an inspired voice summoned the race to a more exalted conception of mutual obligation: "All things whatsoever YE WOULD that men should do to you, do ye even so to them;

for this is the law and the prophets." It was compelling the law of love to others to keep pace with the most selfish tendencies of the human heart. The seed seemed for the moment to have fallen upon stony ground; but it was not so. The voice was heard through all the din of arms. It appealed to the generous and noble impulses of man; and it did not appeal in vain. Echo caught the sound, and the chains of the slave rattled until they snapped asunder. Emancipation then began, seeking for its natural home the altar of every Christian church. And thus it went on, ever enlarging the sphere of its exercise, until checked by the cupidity of the European, who found, in the diversity at once of color and of religious belief, an excuse for listening to the promptings of his baser nature. An African or an Indian, because he was not white, and knew nothing of Christianity, was therefore not within the purview of the precept which enjoins love to man: hence he might be turned into a slave. Such was the logic of a generation corrupted by the discovery of American gold. So far did this reasoning extend, that it recorded itself in the statute-book, even of puritan Massachusetts, which swerved alike from its devotion to liberty and the cause of God, by provisions for perpetuating the exclusion of the African race from the benefits of the Christian faith. Time brought with it better feelings, and a new generation redeemed the dishonor by striking at its very source in the African slave-trade. The instance is encouraging to us, who trust in the ever-living force of truth upon the conscience of future generations. It shows that, like the grains which for thousands of years have remained inert in the bosoms of withered corpses, nothing is necessary but to transfer it from dead to living hands to find it once more reviving with the unimpaired energies of youth.

Such is the aspect of the slavery question, when viewed in the pure light of Christian morals. Having nothing to do with the material interests of the hour, nor yet any necessary connection with the economical interests of states, it would

seem as if no hope could be indulged of escaping its effect wherever Christianity prevails, but least of all in the United States, in the midst of rising millions, whom it is the pride of the country to see instructed, elevated, and refined, — instructed by knowledge, elevated by faith, and refined by benevolence. Here we send our children to church to learn their duty to God, and to school to extend their usefulness to man. Examples of moral excellence are spread thickly before their eyes; and they are taught that heroism is not the less a universal object of admiration for the rarity with which it is obtained. If such be, then, the nature of the lessons inculcated by the old on the minds of the young, is it to be imagined that they will always be thrown away, as if taught to stocks and stones? Will there not be, here and there, one impressible heart open, for instance, to the solemn injunction of the great Teacher, and zealous to apply it to some obviously fitting purpose? And will such a heart, when fully inspired by such an object, be always ready to stop short at the occurrence of some merely conventional barrier of man's devising? I think these questions can be answered truly but in one way. The enthusiasm natural to the young everywhere, which is stimulated in America by the wide range given to its exercise, could not fail, sooner or later, to expand itself upon its greatest national paradox, the existence and development of domestic slavery. The subject had attracted attention from the very day that created us a people. But only upon one occasion, prior to 1830, had it roused, to any great extent, the public sensibilities. This was in 1820, upon the admission of the State of Missouri to the Union. But the topic had then been treated and decided almost exclusively as a political matter, with too much of the taint of temporary jealousies about it to move deeply the speculative aspirations for abstract right. As a consequence, the truce entitled the Missouri Compromise was received with general acquiescence, and, for a time, there was a calm of profound indifference. But that time, very obviously, could

not be expected to last for ever. In point of fact, before ten years were over, a few young hearts had begun to swell under the conviction of a neglected duty. Perhaps, in the wide surface of the land, there were not more then than three or four inclined to give words to their thought, or conscious of the effects which would follow if they should. But that number was enough. For they struck a chord which was ready to vibrate in many an unobserved retreat.

Yet the men who did this were not among the strong in wealth or in social condition, in reputation or in popularity. Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison rose from the level of the community, without a hand to help or an eye to guide. No flourish of trumpets heralded their advance; no chorus of praise waited on their steps. The voice was like that of one crying in the wilderness. Few heard it, still fewer understood. Yet there were those to whose open ears it seemed as the sound of a trumpet. Most of them were women, who, with the nicer instinct of moral discrimination which marks the sex, *felt* at the same time that they responded to the call. With them there were no doubts or questions of casuistry to delay. They understood that a great sin was creeping over the land, and that they were bound to be up, and doing the little in their power to rouse the nation to a sense of it. The result which was attended by the most striking public consequences was the union of twelve persons, of unexceptionable character, into an association called the Female Antislavery Society in Boston.

Perhaps this was fanaticism. It certainly was enthusiasm. But, before blaming it, my question must first be answered, how so natural a consequence of our religious and social theories could have been avoided. The origin of this movement was exclusively in conscience. The new organization contemplated only the single proposition, that slavery, "*because* in direct violation of the laws of God," ought to be abolished. But it devised no means to reach that end, beyond the dissemination of the reasons of this belief among those

whom it was essential to convert. It specified no direction of its labors, excepting the general one of slavery, wherever found. The *right* to do thus much, in any portion of the United States, cannot be denied. The *propriety* of it, in the existing circumstances of the country, was a mere question of difference of opinion. The *manner* of doing the work was doubtless indiscreet; for to have expected prudence from these persons would have been to misconceive the very first spring of their enterprise. There was no politic end to serve about it, scarcely any well-defined aim, unless it were the discharge of individual responsibility. No one out of their circle was held to justify or excuse their acts. Yet, in the face of all these obvious considerations, the persons who started this movement, women though they were, were held forth to the indignation of the public, as if they had been conspirators, with a deep-laid plot to overthrow the republic. And, not contented with mere violence of denunciation, the enemies they roused resorted to means, in order to prevent them from prosecuting their design, which not only failed utterly in their object, but greatly contributed to change the nature of the question, and to promote the growth of a more extended agitation than they had striven to avoid.

Again, if I am asked what made slavery a national concern in America, I answer, the attempt to stifle the discussion of it in a form of abstract morals, the least dangerous to the public peace of any that it could be expected to take. The Female Antislavery Society of Boston must be conceded to have intended aggression upon slaveholders, if it be aggression to call that *wrong* which they had just reason to think wrong. They were aggressive, just as every conscientious minister of God is weekly aggressive upon the offences which his parishioners may commit against the decalogue. But, in any worse sense of the word, implying a wanton desire to do injury, they were never aggressive. As fit would it be to denominate the occasional severity of language of the great Exemplar of our faith, during his mission on earth, aggressive

upon those to whom it was addressed. But, even if it were to be admitted that they exceeded the limits of propriety, and offended by excess of harshness, that error sinks out of observation in presence of the much greater one committed by those who attempted to set them right. Let me briefly recapitulate the events of that memorable period.

The women composing the Society already named, having no idea of the worldly interests which they might set in motion, nor any fear of politicians or anxiety about their fortunes, nor yet much respect of persons high or low, — for all these things scarcely entered into their heads, — went on calling meetings, like any other charitable or benevolent association; at which they were accustomed to solicit, from such of the few men as were willing and able to come forward at that time, some words of encouragement and exhortation. In utter unconsciousness of transgressing any rule of national propriety, they extended an invitation to Mr. George Thompson, an Englishman visiting America, and celebrated for his eloquence exerted upon the same topic at home, to appear, and, by some remarks, to give interest to one of these occasions. Had these ladies been wise as serpents or cunning as foxes, they would have seen at once the opening which this would give to attack; but the whole history shows to any calm observer, that they were innocent of guile, and for that reason, if for no other, should have been indulgently treated. As their form of Constitution contemplated opposition to *slavery*, wherever it had a foothold on earth, without specifying any place in particular, it does not seem as if the mere fact of an announcement of a speech on that subject from a foreigner should have been made a great stumbling-block of offence. Had the objectors waited long enough to gather from that foreigner's lips the evidence of an attempt by him to interfere with the domestic politics of a country to which he was a stranger, they would have greatly strengthened themselves before the world. M. Kossuth, during his visit to America and since, has done a great deal in that way,

without subjecting himself to much public censure, although I must be permitted to think he deserved it quite as much as Mr. Thompson. Be this, however, as it may, the discontented refused to wait. With a degree of fury quite unexampled among the respectable citizens of modern Boston, a crowd, described at the time as composed of well-dressed gentlemen, rushed to the place where these few women had assembled; threatened their personal safety if they refused to disperse; and, for the want of the main object of their search, the odious foreigner, they wreaked their vengeance upon the miserable wooden sign on the building, which told the world that the Female Antislavery Society met there. I wish I could stop here. But my task compels me to add, that these infuriated gentlemen were with difficulty prevented — by their regard for a not unsympathizing mayor, laboring to reconcile his duty to protect the few, with his sentiments leaning to the many — from committing acts of outrage upon one native citizen, I mean Mr. William L. Garrison, on account of his share in originating this movement; which, had they been perpetrated as intended, would have left a stain on the memory of that city no Bunker Hill or Lexington or Concord, no private virtues, nor public energies, could ever have effaced. As it was, the mayor succeeded in protecting Mr. Garrison, by putting him, with malefactors, IN THE JAIL. You all doubtless remember the story. I will not dwell upon it a moment longer than is necessary for my purpose. Suffice it to say, that this event completely altered the relations of America to the slave-question. It presented a picture of a majority determined, at all hazards, to deny the right even of inoffensive women to meet and discuss the wrongfulness of slavery. And it made moral heroines of those devoted women. To this day, I admit that I cannot read the simple narrative, drawn up by themselves, of the trials of that hour, without feeling a gush of gratitude, that, if Boston, in the nineteenth century, produced the persecutors for opinion's sake, Boston likewise produced the martyrs, who would not

have fallen a whit behind their prototypes of old, in the courage and the constancy with which they suffered for the truth.

Let it not be said that this was a local outrage, committed by irresponsible men, and by no means involving the country at large in the sanction of a principle so odious as the suppression of liberty of speech. The excuse will not avail. For, only a few weeks before the event, at a very crowded meeting of the citizens of Boston, held in Faneuil Hall, a resolution had been adopted, with great unanimity, claiming the right of the state to prosecute individuals adopting measures, the *tendency* of which was adverse to slavery. And, at other public meetings, held in the largest towns of other states, the spirit of this suggestion, if not directly adopted, was nowhere rebuked. The Legislature of Massachusetts was soon after opened by the Executive, with hints touching the possibility of construing "every thing that tended to disturb the relations with slavery," as an offence against the peace, which might be prosecuted at common law. I allude to these things in no offensive spirit, and only to show that such was public opinion, not merely in Massachusetts, but everywhere. Yet the men and women aimed at had done nothing illegal, nothing immoral, nothing unbecoming their character as Christians, nothing which posterity will not approve rather than censure. It was the majority that did the wrong. And what was it that guided the arm of that majority, if not the slave-power? Already, as if in the silence of a single night, it had grown up to such strength that it had but to wave its magic wand over the wide surface of the Union, and almost the whole of a free people were as prostrate before it as the most submissive of the slaves. Surely, then, no reasonable man can be at a loss to pronounce what it is that made the slave-question of national concern in America.

This was the moment when that question assumed its political aspect. It was the fault, if fault there was, not of the men and women assailed, but of those who assailed

them. Had these been less impatient and more tolerant, they might have succeeded in confining the agitation within a narrow circle of persons little fitted for success in the pursuit of practical ends in life. It is not always those who have the qualities which hallow the martyr's crown that unite with them the powers that effect the apostle's triumph. Had the majority waited, they would have been less terrified by the doings of the Female Antislavery Society of Boston; for the sequel has shown, that, with the purest motives and with indefatigable industry, they have failed to combine other elements essential to success in every great enterprise. It will scarcely be denied, even by them, that, on the whole, they have not yet, to any appreciable extent, arrived at the point of impressing upon the judgment of the great body of the people of the United States any liking for their later views or policy. I must be permitted, in no offensive spirit, to add, that, throughout their action, whilst developing at all times the most brilliant natural and acquired gifts in their circle of friends, they have continued to manifest the same neglect of the maxims of prudence which marked their outset. The consequence has been the commission of errors which have materially narrowed the sphere of their legitimate influence. Animated with the most genuine philanthropy, they have not escaped just exceptions to the intolerant spirit of their denunciations towards all who differ from them. Inspired by religious convictions, they have permitted themselves to appear identified with a very opposite class who treat all forms of worship with scorn. And, impelled by patriotism, they have voluntarily preferred the path which verges close upon the confines of treason. This multiplication of points of dispute to so startling an extent, before a public already prejudiced, would have rendered it easy to neutralize their labors, had it not been for the intemperate attack made by their enemies at the beginning. It was this which roused another and a distinct class of citizens, who, taking comparatively little interest in the question

of slavery whilst in its abstract form, and not quite satisfied with the mode of presenting it thus far adopted, were suddenly made alive to its political importance by the attempt to stop the discussion. Out of this little kernel, no bigger than a mustard-seed, has grown the great tree of political antislavery; a tree which has now spread so widely its various branches as to overshadow the whole land; a tree which it is idle to hope ever to root out, without bringing up at the same time the whole of the evil with which that root is intertwined. And now I confidently ask, if it be true that sixteen women of Boston helped to sow that little kernel, who were they that watered the plant, and gave it increase, but the very same practical and conservative gentlemen who have uniformly found the greatest fault with the agitation?

Yet I am well aware of the fact, that a very different impression of the origin of political antislavery prevails among even candid and enlightened persons. The charge has been widely spread, that its design was to scatter ruin through the slaveholding regions by wantonly instigating slaves to claim their rights. There is not a shadow of evidence, so far as I can see into the history of this movement, to support that charge. Single and striking instances of language pushed to extravagance, or of individual violence in action, there may have been; but by such exceptions no associated body can be fairly judged. So far is it from the truth, I think it may safely be affirmed of what has thus far been done, that it has been wholly defensive in its character, and preventive, rather than remedial, in its nature. Let me go one step further, and express my own opinion, that, instead of being too aggressive and bold in assaulting the slaveholding positions, it is rather exposed to objection as timid in adhering to its own. Political antislavery has occasionally wavered and qualified, deprecated and disavowed so much, for the sake of conciliating a little faltering aid at home, as to lose something of that moral power which makes the chief element of strength in great enterprises. I intend no word of

censure. My object is to state a fact which has been grievously misconceived. I well understand the nature of the obstacles to this movement. I am familiar with the pleas used for going no faster than a sluggish public sensibility will follow. I do not deny that America is peculiarly addicted to the toleration of equivocating morals in public affairs; hence that an advocacy of the most imperishable principle is liable, in its progress, to become coupled with the floating corpse of some caprice of the hour. All this may or may not have happened in the present case. But that is not the fault currently found with it by opponents. They say it has been, and is, wantonly aggressive. And they indulge, after their custom, a wide stretch of imagination in painting a picture of horrors which would follow in the wake of its success. My friends, there is absolutely nothing of all this in the record. If there had been, do you think, that, with the means and the numbers at the command of the party, something could not have been done sufficiently effective, at least to enable the myriads of persons on the watch for materials of accusation to make up some charges against it more convincing than the most puerile declamation? The slave-states are not inaccessible to fear. "I have not the slightest apprehension of danger at home," said a slaveholder gaily, some years since, to a distinguished statesman of the free states. "I am glad to hear it," said that gentleman in reply. "But, pray, what is the ground of your confidence?" "Ground of confidence!" was the triumphant answer: "why, I sleep every night with a loaded gun at my bedside, and a pair of pistols under my pillow." This was before the rise of the antislavery movement. Yet quite as great a degree of confidence, to say the least, remains, unshaken by any outside influence, down to this day. The charge of wanton aggressiveness is, then, surely quite absurd.

In truth, from the day that political opposition was first made, twenty years ago, until now, the actors in it have been

kept too busy in establishing the rights to which they were entitled as freemen out of the borders of the slave-states, to have time, even had they felt the wish, to make an inroad upon them. They had been brought up in the belief, that liberty, in America at least, if nowhere else, meant something. They had heard, on every Fourth of July, a chorus of eulogists dilating upon the ineffable excellence of those axioms engrafted upon the declaration of our national independence by the hand of the great apostle of modern democracy, Thomas Jefferson. If the slave-owners find themselves now somewhat embarrassed by the docility of these scholars in mastering the lesson their representative taught them, they must comfort themselves with the remembrance of the triumphs their state once obtained in the Union through the popular confidence in him which his championship of these maxims alone had inspired. The maxims, when he introduced them into the creed of the nation, were certainly in advance of the sentiments entertained by the majority of the people for whom they were spoken. They were in advance of the sentiments of the Virginia of that day, and she has scarcely gone forward since. That state had instructed her delegates to move only *colonial* independence. Such an object was exactly attained by Richard Henry Lee, when he proposed, on the 7th of June, 1776, his well-known resolution, "that *these United Colonies* are, and of right ought to be, *free and independent states.*" But colonies might become states without in any way affecting the relations of the people to each other who lived within those states. The act proposed was in no way an individual, but a corporate, act. It threw off the supremacy of the mother country, and that was all. The existence of domestic slavery in any or all of the states thus made independent did not necessarily conflict with principles which might have justified a resort to that extreme measure against her. The case was widely different, however, when the reasons deemed sufficient to justify the *people* in a separation were submitted to the world in a

formal Declaration. It was in *their* name, and not in the name of the colonies, that certain truths were put forth as self-evident. It was in *their* name announced that "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." Yet doubtless one half of the representatives who set their names to the paper, as well as a great number of those in whose lips these words were placed, were at the moment depriving, both of their liberty and of the pursuit of happiness, a large number of men constituting a part of the great whole in whose behalf that independence was declared. The truths were in reality in advance of the age. Once more the sower had gone out to sow; but this time it was in the political field. Some of his seed fell on the rocks, some on thorns which choked it; but some was lucky enough to fall on good ground, and bear fruit immediately. Honest and single-hearted patriots picked it up, in good faith, at the time, saved it, and transmitted it to their descendants. Opinion became so fixed that not many have been since found bold enough publicly to resist it. And when the hour struck in which a few men and women, for an attempt to express their devotion to these truths, were treated like malefactors, and, as disturbers of the public peace, menaced with punishment, those were not wanting in America who felt that an occasion had happened to test their fidelity and their courage.

The struggle was not now for the rights of others, but for their own. It must be admitted that the number who enlisted at first was quite small; and among them not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble or renowned for public or private services, proved ready to answer the call. From the days of the Master down to this, the experience has been ever the same. The weight of a cross can be taken up only by spirits hardened by the toils of life, and used to its privations. The present generation has designated these men under the odious names of fanatics, incendiaries, and traitors. But the

calmer judgment of history will declare that a more self-sacrificing, disinterested, patriotic band are not to be found in the annals of mankind. I say this the more readily that I can claim no personal share in the praise. I was then among the number convinced, that time, which was daily increasing the preponderance of the free states, would bring with it a remedial public sentiment, without the need of agitation; and I shared the delusion of the majority, that discussion would rouse more obstacles than it could remove. The heroic few, who saw more clearly into the depth of the evil, understood, that time, instead of approximating the freedom of the slave, threatened to fasten fetters upon themselves. They felt that the slave-power, from the very constitution of its nature necessarily aggressive in its spirit, had in silence succeeded in intrenching itself firmly in the government of the nation, and that abstaining from resistance was only giving new means for perpetuating its sway. In the face of a combination such as the country never before had witnessed, — with the press, the politicians, the merchants, the lawyers, the church, the government, and its army of dependants of every sort, and, lastly, with the popular prejudices against the slaves because they were black, all united against them to protect slavery; with every thing to lose, and little to gain to themselves, from their determination, — these few calmly began the struggle. They were forthwith abused, traduced, vilified, denounced. The batteries of a press little scrupulous in the use of poisoned weapons, especially against those not shielded by the world's regard, were opened in all their fury upon them. They were calumniated, persecuted in their business, hunted down. A price was set upon their heads. Some were mobbed, their property destroyed or burned, and one at least was shot. There were those who shrunk back appalled. A very small number, who had enlisted as adventurers, and who deserted as soon as they saw the unprofitable nature of the enterprise, proved unworthy; and their cases were made a standing theme of reproach to the remainder.

But the greater part persevered. I do not mean to affirm, that in all cases they adopted the most eligible paths to gain their end. I do not claim for them that they made no mistakes. The acute sagacity which unerringly marches to its end is seldom allied with the enthusiasm which prompts to acts of moral daring. Let him pick flaws who is sure that he could have done better. For my part, after reviewing the series of formidable struggles in which they were engaged, always in defence of the most unquestioned principles, I cannot if I would, and I will not if I could, refuse to bear my feeble testimony to the truth, that, if those principles should ever be re-instated in the national policy of the United States, the honors of commencing the gigantic labor must be reserved for the brows of those indomitable men.

I think I have, by this narrative, furnished a clear answer to the question with which I began my lecture, — What makes slavery of national concern in America? I say that it is the unavoidable consequence of the presence of a power, which, as it steadily and surely increases, deranges more and more the natural operation of a republican government, and from which there can be no escape but by a resolute and persevering system of counteraction. Thus far, that system has been almost entirely negative in its character, confined to the strict limits of self-defence and self-restoration. I dwell upon this point the more, that such pains have been taken to create an opposite impression upon the public mind. The slave-owners have been held up as objects of sympathy for the persecutions they have undergone, at the very time that they have been straining every nerve to convert the federal government into an engine to extend and confirm the power they have gained over the free states. On the other side, not an effort has been made to disseminate, in any form, a single doctrine of which the most jealous *republican* slaveholder could have the smallest right justly to complain. His position as a citizen of a distinct community has been acknowledged and

carefully respected, even whilst he has not been always equally scrupulous on his part. Denying, as all true antislavery men must, the validity of any property in man, it certainly argues some self-restraint, that they never promulgate the doctrine in a form designed to reach the slaves themselves. Indeed, no contest has ever been raised in behalf of their freedom in any other shape than as the voluntary grant of their masters. And, for the most part, the questions at issue have been confined rather to the re-establishment of the principles of liberty in the free states, than the reversal of that practical absolutism, which, whatever delusive shapes it may assume to beguile credulous or favoring people among us, is yet the ruling passion of those who hold and mean to spread the power they wield through their slaves.

Am I challenged by any one of my still deluded countrymen to prove this proposition? The limits of my present lecture will not permit me to enlarge upon the evidence to put it beyond a doubt. Neither do I conceive it necessary. The quickly succeeding events of the past twenty years are too fresh in the memory of most of us to require more than a passing notice. Need I allude to the years consumed in establishing the right of free speech in regard to slavery, without personal hazard to the speaker, in the free states and at the seat of government? Intimately connected with this was the restoration of the right of petition to the Federal Legislature, so long denied, so reluctantly surrendered, and even now so sedulously evaded. Next in order came the success of the Texas scheme, the first undisguised attempt to make the foreign policy of the nation subservient to the establishment of a permanent preponderance of the slave-power in the general government. Upon the heels of this followed the war to punish Mexico for resenting the trick by which Texas had been torn from her. The peace was attended with the acquisition of California and New Mexico, which brought with it a reversal of the policy early adopted, — to guarantee freedom to free territories. Next in order

came the struggle to establish compromises *favorable* to slavery, which was immediately succeeded by the struggle to annul those parts of earlier compromises *unfavorable* to slavery. Over and above all were the provisions of the fugitive slave-law, so revolting to every generous and manly bosom; and the practical proscription from official station of those who refused to acknowledge that it was just and right. My friends, I wish, in these remarks, to deal in no exciting language. I will not allow myself to speak of this long-continued series of attacks upon the best principles at the base of our theory of government, as they appear to me to deserve. All that I shall do is to say, that, throughout the entire period, the labors of the antislavery men have been confined to measures of defence, and not directed to aggression. They have been almost uniformly defeated, not from any want of energy or foresight on their part, but from their inability to convince numbers of their fellow-citizens of the existence of any danger before it was upon them, and to inspire them with any courage to face it after it had come. It was not they, but their opponents, who made slavery a question of national concern, by forcing upon them the necessity of defending freedom against its aggressions.

Permit me here to turn aside from my main design, for a single moment, to take notice of one other view of the political opposition to slavery, which has been presented with some effect upon the minds of moderate men. It has been said that the movement is *sectional*, or, in other words, that it is designed only to strengthen the North and to depress the South, as contradistinguished from the Union movement, which is *national*, because it seeks to consult the good of all alike. This distinction originated in the tactics of those who, for more than half a century, have steadily persevered in a policy which has actually done much to establish the preponderance of one section of the Union, and that the least populous and prosperous, over all the others, East, West, and North. And, in

order to sustain it, they have not scrupled to read *us* a lecture, drawn from the admirable farewell of the father of his country, deprecating parties founded upon geographical discriminations! To the spirit of that exhortation of the great and good Washington, I will permit no man to exceed me in hearty devotion. I can conceive of nothing more belittling an American statesman than any attempt to raise up for himself an ephemeral popularity, by appealing to the local prejudices of his neighbors against persons not originating among them. Time has condemned, as an unprincipled demagogue, the man who, under the specious rallying-cry of Wilkes and Liberty, profited by stimulating the passions of the British populace against Lord Bute and Lord Mansfield, because they were Scotchmen. Even the sturdy morality and the conscientious piety of Samuel Johnson have been transmitted to us defiled by something of the same bigotry towards his northern neighbors. Yet the Scotch have since won for themselves a reputation so brilliant in the higher departments of human pursuit, that an Englishman of the present day would recoil at once from the idea of reiterating the unscrupulous invective against them which once passed for wisdom, sheltered under the abused name of Junius. Indeed, history is too full of warnings of the evil consequences of geographical distinctions in breeding ill will between nations, not to make them revolting to the judgment of every rational and benevolent man. The poet saw the analogy clearly when he mourned that —

> "Lands, intersected by a narrow frith,
> Abhor each other. Mountains interposed
> Make enemies of nations, who had else,
> Like kindred drops, been mingled into one.
> Thus man devotes his brother, and destroys;
> And worse than all, and most to be deplored
> As human nature's broadest, foulest blot,
> Chains him, and tasks him, and exacts his sweat
> With stripes, that mercy, with a bleeding heart,
> Weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast."

It is not the part of those who complain of slavery, as founded upon a geographical and natural distinction, to object to any man, or set of men, merely because they were born or live in a particular section of the world's surface. In point of fact, this has nothing whatever to do with their system. It is SLAVERY, and not the South, East, West, or North, that they oppose. The accidental circumstance, that slavery is found established only in one portion of the United States, does not in any way change the nature of their objection. To all the citizens residing in that region who do not concern themselves in upholding this great evil, they entertain the same sentiments which they hold to all others of their fellow-citizens everywhere. Towards those among them who share their own feelings, they have ever been disposed to manifest peculiar sympathy. And, even in the case of fair-minded slaveholders themselves, intelligent antislavery men are very far from the smallest inclination to treat them with unkindness, or that harsh intolerance which they would certainly themselves experience if at their mercy in their own country. Neither do they understand, by their policy, that they intend to do them any thing but substantial good. They fully believe that nothing is so essential to the rescue of their section of country from ultimate destruction, as an early preparation for that emancipation which must come sooner or later; and that it most deeply concerns the safety and prosperity of those with whom the decision is exclusively confined, that they should be quick to feel that necessity. There is nothing of sectionalism or geographical distinction in all this. It is the *thing*, and not the *person* or the *place*, that they attack. To say that they raise sectional questions, because they oppose that thing in the quarters where only it is to be found, is about as reasonable as it would be to charge the authorities of a city with sectional feelings, because they mark out some particular street as the seat of certain vicious habits of life which they desire to uproot; or to say that the citizens of Vicksburg were sectional, when they turned out,

some years ago, to break up by force the nests of gamblers and desperadoes who had fixed their quarters "under the hill."

Returning now from this digression to the main point of my lecture, I think I have sufficiently shown what it is that makes the slave-question of national concern in America. I have ascribed it to an overpowering necessity, growing out of the resistless increase of the slave-population, and the unavoidable obligations which it creates to *defend* free institutions against the adverse influences which it introduces into the national policy. It remains to me only to append a few suggestions relative to the other question which I submitted, How is this defence to be conducted for the future by the people who have felt it their duty to enlist in it?

To arrive at an accurate answer, it is indispensable, first of all, to take a calm survey of the disposition and the strength of the opposing forces in the field. It must be conceded, that the slave-power is now in undisputed possession of the official strongholds in the general government. It directs the Executive and the Legislative departments, and holds in reserve the federal Judiciary as a last resort. This slave-power consists, in fact, of about three hundred and fifty thousand active men, spreading over a large territorial surface, commanding the political resources of fifteen states directly, and, through their connections, materially affecting those of five or six more. These persons, and all their numerous friends and dependents, in and out of the slave-holding region, are held together in interest by a common bond, in the sum of two thousand millions of dollars worth of what they consider property. For the sake of protecting this against the prevailing tendencies of the age, and the effect of public sentiment created by a large body of their own countrymen, it is impossible that they should escape adopting a system of policy aggressive upon the rights of freemen. They become, in their action, to all intents and purposes, men of one idea. This idea necessarily includes

the extension of their own power, whether they are sensible of its influence in that direction or not. They throw into the public councils their allotted portion of representatives, all equally pledged to be faithful to it, whatever they may think upon other subjects. The unity of policy thus secured for all the time spreads its influence far beyond the limits of its own circle. It is always at hand to wield an umpirage in its own favor, between the contending factions and the rival aspirations of prominent statesmen of the free states. It never relaxes in its vigilance over public events. It never is turned aside by the temptation of an incidental pursuit. The sense of danger overrules every other consideration. Around it have been arrayed, for its protection, alike the conservative and the destructive elements of society in the free states, — the richest and the poorest class, the best citizens and the worst: the former from an instinctive dread of any thing that looks like an attack upon prescriptive rights to property; the latter from an adhesion to the superiority of caste, the more tenacious by reason of the sense of self-degradation in every other particular. In addition to all this, it must be admitted that the best abilities of the people in the slave-holding region are enlisted in the defence of their rights. There is no path to distinction but that of public life, and that path leads but one way. Literature, science, and mechanical inventions, lag far behind, relatively to the progress they make elsewhere. Commerce and navigation are managed by citizens of the free states; agriculture, by the slaves. With slaveholders, the mind must either lie fallow in sensuality and indolence, or it must seek its exercise in politics directed to one end, — the support of slavery. As a consequence, the representation of the slave-power in the federal councils becomes one of more than average capacity, of trained experience, of substantial harmony in the adaptation of means to ends, and last, but not least, of quite flexible public morality. This last peculiarity grows out of the inevitable substitution, in their social theory, of the false code of

honor for the unchangeable law of God; a fitting corollary of the axiom, that one man may own his neighbor. Hence it follows that the members of this body can shelter each other in the assumption, in the transfer, or in the abandonment, of positions, to suit each varying emergency, in a manner which separately they would scarcely venture to justify, and which would destroy any other body. For they make the public opinion of the community, to which only they hold themselves accountable before mankind; and they compel their church, by a sense of common interest, to the heaven-daring task of justifying them, even in the presence of God.

In opposition to this moral Goliath, with a spear-staff like a weaver's beam, its head weighing six hundred shekels of iron, coming forward, in the pride of his strength, to look down all opposition to his sway, what have the friends of human liberty, of equal rights, and of eternal justice, to produce? Their only champion is a TRUTH which commands the assent of all sincere republicans over the globe; a truth hallowed at the birth of American liberty, and twined into the heart of every man who feels the wrongs of the slave. This truth is invincible, only because it cannot die. Not like the fabled Antæus of old, when worsted, borrowing new strength from contact with the earth alone; but rather most invigorated the farther it is removed above it, towards the skies. The history of the present century is a history of frequent defeats, and yet of gradual and certain progress to success. Where is the combination that rallied this country, with astonishing unanimity, in 1835, against the very naming of the word slavery? Gone! resolved into its original elements! Where are the two great political organizations next dividing the country on matters of momentary concern, whilst each kept true to one duty, of presenting a wall of brass around the great object of common protection? Gone! crumbled away, gradually but certainly, under the mining process which they could neither remedy nor prevent. Where is the elaborate association of

1850, which sought to fix upon the ægis of the Union a Medusa's head, with which to turn all the enemies of slavery into stone? Gone to ruin, like all the rest! Neither is it fair to say that this has been brought about by the work of men's hands. The power of the antislavery organization, as such, has at no time been adequate to produce similar results. Always numerically feeble, always looked down upon by its more powerful neighbors, it has yet seen its principles gradually working their way into their vitals, until now that there is little left to oppose their progress, and yet that party itself appears little more in the ascendant than it did at its commencement.

The cause of this peculiarity must be looked for in the vacillation of purpose characteristic of the public policy of a free people. It is not that they do not now generally assent to the great truth which makes the strength of the antislavery cause. The difficulty is, that it seems to them an abstraction, not connected, as in the case of the slaveholders, with any temporal, absorbing self-interest. Hence it happens, that, in the field of local politics, it supplies no steady motive of action, but is put aside for the benefit of other principles and other measures, which, at the moment, seem to have a closer relation to their own immediate advantage. It follows, that, when public men are selected to represent the free states, there is no one principle predominant in the choice. It is not enough that a man shall be known to be an unflinching friend of freedom. A large and powerful body consider that quality as of little use, if he be not true to their opinions concerning some local measure, as, for example, that to suppress the traffic in ardent spirits. Another wish him to be right on free trade, or on the duty of protecting home manufactures. If he does not agree with all these opposite views, his utility in the slavery contest is overlooked by some of them; and they will very probably vote to defeat him, and elect some opponent who agrees with them in their favorite idea, even though he should be lukewarm, or even

worse, in his views of the question of freedom. Thus, with the great multiplication of diverse fancies, which inevitably happens in a country where opinions are at perfect liberty, come also a divided representation in the federal government, and distracted councils. A struggle then takes place between a hundred and fifty men animated by one idea, and two hundred and fifty animated, say, by twenty different ideas. The issue is obvious. No one can wonder that the smaller and best compacted force should, for the moment, claim all the honors of the victory.

The latest instance of a serious deflection of this sort occurred a few months ago, the importance of which mainly depended upon the fact that it happened at a moment when the general sentiment of the country betokened, for the first time, a decisive triumph of liberty. You doubtless understand me to refer to the combination, made in a novel form, but now widely extended, having for its ostensible object the exclusion of foreign-born persons and Roman Catholics from all share of power over public affairs. The merits or demerits of this movement, and the means to which it resorts to gain its ends, present questions deserving of consideration in their place, but which are wholly foreign to the present occasion. You will, however, perhaps bear with me a few moments more, if I add a word upon the relation which this new agitation seems to me to bear particularly to the slave-question. So far as it may be likely to interest honest people who have heretofore associated the support of the power of a few slaveholders with their ideas of genuine democracy, I think the change will be from a greater to a less error, and therefore for the better. In like manner I will say, that, in so far as it may draw away the very respectable gentlemen who have labored to save slavery, thinking all the while they were saving the Union, to another field of labor of a more harmless character, the difference may be counted a gain. Neither of these classes has yet shown any thing else than a great repugnance to embrace the doctrines

which we uphold. But there are other persons, I am sorry to add, — and the number in my own state, if not in others, is quite large, who have heretofore ranked among the most earnest friends of liberty, — whose course in joining this crusade has penetrated me with feelings of profound concern. It is of them, and them only, I would speak in the present connection. That they have acted under an honest belief that they are thus more fully carrying out their cherished principles, I do not permit myself to doubt. Suspecting, not without reason, that Romanism in America has been generally arrayed in opposition to their views, they have regarded an attack upon that as equivalent to the overthrow of one of the outposts of slavery in the free states. A few may have been precipitated into it by impatience at the obstacles interposed to the apparent progress of the direct antislavery movement, and by the attraction of the new patent for gaining ground by secrecy and surprises. Whilst I can understand and allow for all these inducements to leave the old path, I am not the less convinced that they have led to a serious mistake, the effects of which may be to postpone, at least for a time, our hopes of an early triumph. My reasons for this opinion must be very briefly given. They are these : —

1. There is no road so good to travel to get to an object as the straight road. Every turning, however slight at first, may, if we follow it long enough, lead a very different way, from which it will not be easy to get back again to the right one. At best, the course of our friends is like descending from a clear, strong, well-fortified position, to a weaker, a less defined, and more extended one. As I have already remarked, the power of antislavery lies in the TRUTH. The more directly it can be kept before the world, freed from ambiguities and irrelevant associations of every kind; the more singly it can be presented to the mind, the more hold it will gain upon the public confidence. One great obstacle to its progress in the past has been the skilful use made by

its enemies of the materials furnished by its own friends to fasten upon it burdens which it was under no call to bear. This error has been too often committed in every stage of the struggle, and has never been firmly enough resisted. "One thing at a time" (the maxim of John De Witt in the management of high affairs of state) is equally applicable to measures of reform. Attacking the influence of a religious denomination of Christians is a process of itself somewhat novel in American politics, and introduces a complete change in those grounds of controversy which had been taken in the slave-question. And, as if this were not enough, another dispute is superadded upon the rights of foreigners to share in the councils of the country they have chosen to adopt; which is a second time diverting the public attention to a different decision upon a still different train of reasoning. On these questions, it is by no means unlikely that the slaveholders themselves might be found ranged on the same side with our friends. They have no sympathy with foreigners, a very large proportion of whom shun the territories worked by slave-labor, in order to settle, improve, and enrich the free states. They care little about Catholics as such, for the same reason. Why, then, are they not fit, if they choose it, to rush into the new movement, and control it, at least in their own states? But, if they do, what becomes of our old friends? Like the dog in the fable, who in snapping at the shadow lost his bone in the water, they will spend their strength upon inferior issues, whilst the slaveholder profits of the respite which he wants, to hide the progress of slavery out of sight of the people. For slavery does not diminish its power meanwhile. Every day's delay adds hundreds and thousands of dollars to the weight in the scale which must have its corresponding counterpoise on the side of freedom. I cannot but think, then, that antislavery men have got into the wrong place and into wrong company, — that is, if they honestly mean to do antislavery work.

2. But they will reply to this objection by urging that they can prevail in this new and very popular movement, and finally succeed in giving to it the impulse of their own opinions against slavery; and this will be a great help to the cause, worth working for: to which I would object the fact that they have divided the antislavery force by their action, and left a large share of it outside the inclosure which they have entered. If the whole, when united, was not strong enough to give an antislavery character to the whole people around them, how are the parts, when separated, likely to succeed better with proportionate numbers of that people? The most unfortunate consequence of this mistake is, that it impairs the unity of the antislavery action. Those who cannot consent to accept the new mode, for reasons wholly distinct from the slave-question, who spurn the bonds of secret obligations, or disapprove an indiscriminate crusade against foreign-born persons, must continue their labors in the former way, without any confidence in the co-operation of their old friends, however well-disposed these may be to aid them; whilst, on the other hand, they can do little to strengthen those within the new order in any emergency, because they have, with their eyes open, assumed a new obligation which covers what they plan from the public eye, and subjects it to become perhaps the contrary to what opposition to slavery would naturally require. The most honest and able champion of true antislavery principles must be dropped, if he is not within the charmed ring, and in his place must be put their most determined enemy, if the majority so decide. Should Joshua R. Giddings, for example, — that tried veteran, himself alone worth an army of raw recruits who never smelt the smoke of a battle, — or Charles Sumner, or Salmon P. Chase, — who have been exposed for years to the fire of that senatorial furnace, hotter to those who will not fall down and worship the idol of slavery there set up than ever was the one prepared by the king of Babylon for the three Jews revolting at a similar command,

and who have come out unscathed, — I say, should these men happen to dislike the chains of a secret, oath-bound society, and decline to join it, they must be cut down without a friendly hand to stay the wrong; unscarred boys, with more malleable consciences, must be put in their places, no matter what the consequent damage to the cause; and every man of the order has sworn to acquiesce, if he do not actively aid in the change! I ask, Is this, can this be, the best way to aid the antislavery cause, if it places men who are friendly to it in such a difficulty? Can every thing be right about a plan which exposes them even to the chance of such results?

3. But it may be said that this difficulty can be avoided by joining the new organization in great force, in which case these excellent men will receive all the support their friends would be delighted to give them. But there is no proof that even this would avail in the new association, formed upon a strange basis, to place them exactly in the same prominent attitude which they occupy now as champions upon the old one. They are *opponents of slavery*, known as such the country over, representing those who have declared this to be their cardinal principle. How are they to gain any strength or honor by changing front, and announcing that thus far they have acted blindly and ignorantly, — that there was something else more important than slavery which they had overlooked and forgotten? They must first persecute the Irishman and the Englishman, the German, the Frenchman, and the Swede, disfranchise them, degrade them, turn them into beings scarcely above the grade of slaves; they must first wage a fierce religious war against the Catholic, native or stranger, to put him down; and, after they shall have succeeded in doing all that, they will be particularly fitted by their experience to take up the cause of the poor black slave. Moreover, I would venture to submit a question, how, by this variation of policy, they are going to stand in relation to the determined men who do not consent to turn aside, for any

such considerations, to the right or to the left, — who nail their flag to the mast, and fight on, fight ever, in behalf of their old opinions and the policy to which they are pledged? Is not some consideration due to them whose principles have been tried over and over again, and have never been found wanting; who have not, for one instant, been led away, by the temptation of accidental advantage, to the substitution of any other object for the paramount question of liberty; who still stand where they have ever stood, more ready to take the lead in a moment of danger and desertion than when things looked more promising, and numbers indicated an earlier triumph? I say it, boldly and without flinching, of those champions of the cause whom I have named, although I have no authority whatever to speak for them, that, through good report and through evil report, whoever else may fail, they will be true to the main principle to which they long ago pledged their faith, that the slave-question *must* be made paramount to every other consideration in the present emergency in our public affairs.

4. Furthermore: the assumption of an obligation of any sort, which binds men to keep their movements secret, opens a question of morals of the most serious character, upon which antislavery men may reasonably entertain grave doubts, if not decided objections. Secrecy in political action implies one of two things, — either the object to be gained is not an honorable one, and therefore men are ashamed or afraid to avow it before the world; or else, supposing that object to be good, the means by which it is to be attained are to be used to gain an advantage by surprise over somebody. At best, it is no better than the warfare of the savage, who, in the thickness of the forest, or from the depth of a secret cave, aims his deadly rifle at the traveller, suspicious of nothing, who is following his straight road to his destination. I cannot withhold the opinion, that, under such a cover as this furnishes, the best public objects may at any time be degraded in the pursuit to a level with the worst: the very best men

may be put far below the meanest. Even if the opposition to slavery could be made to triumph by such an agency, in my poor judgment the victory would be stripped of half its moral splendor in the process. We claim, as a class, to be honest, free-spoken, conscientious, God-fearing men, having nothing to conceal, and entertaining no malice to a single human being. We resist the slaveholders, because we feel the evils that flow from their devotion to a highly pernicious institution; but we do not seek to enter into any conspiracies against them. They are men, brethren, fellow-citizens, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, unduly biassed perhaps to countenance, perhaps to extend, what we consider fatal evils in public affairs, but at any rate conducting themselves manfully, and without disguises. I would treat them frankly in return. In the experience of a life now considerably beyond its prime, it has been my fortune to find those men most worthy of confidence, whether friendly or hostile, who are the most straightforward, and without concealments. They are the persons whose word I most rely upon in my private relations. They are the men whose action I can most surely count upon in public trusts. I cannot well conceive of that noble image presented by the Roman lyrical poet of the true hero, —

> "Justum et *tenacem propositi* virum
> Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
> Non vultus instantis tyranni
> Mente quatit solida," —

I say, I cannot conceive of a man thus described so fixed to his purpose as to heed neither the misguided passion of a dictating crowd, nor the frown of an impatient despot, as capable of slinking, in the darkness of the night, into some secret place of assignation, to consult with others upon the best way to conceal what they all think, and to contrive with the most effect some trap which they intend to spring upon their fellow-men. I cannot imagine such a man submitting to swear an oath to keep secret whatever may be devised,

good, bad, or indifferent, in the objects of his pursuit, even from the sovereign tribunals of the state, and, furthermore, to comply with the will of the majority, though it may conflict with his personal preference, and his judgment of the course the best interests of the country demand. Had such patriotism as this prevailed in the heroic age of the republic, when the word *virtue* implied courage, capacity, and honor, all in one, George Washington could not have run the noblest career that ever fell to the lot of man; and Lafayette, and Montgomery, Charles Lee, Stirling, Pulaski, Steuben, and De Kalb, who shed their blood — nay, some of whom even laid down their lives — in the cause of a land not their own by birth, would have been placed in a scale of merit beneath the mercenary treachery of a native like Benedict Arnold, and the calculating trickery of the school of Aaron Burr.

No, my friends, I cannot persuade myself that the noble band of patriots and martyrs who pledged all they valued on earth, their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, to the cause of their country, would have redeemed that pledge so well as they did, if they had gone into by-places to listen for a moment to the proposal of an oath secretly to effect the expulsion from their ranks of any of the brave volunteers from distant lands, merely for the reason that they were strangers or Roman Catholics. It is very true, that, in a few cases, they had cause, and very just cause, to be offended with the behavior of some from among them who proved unworthy adventurers rushing here in the crowd with better men. But, when that happened, they made their complaint openly, frankly, as became honest men. One great occasion of dissatisfaction was, that they had entered into something like a secret society, the object of which was to set aside Washington from the chief command. That society became known under the name of its head, the *Conway cabal.* But did the father of his country lower himself so far as to attempt to retaliate in the same way? Did he go into counterplots and secret oaths and contrivances to

effect their removal? No, indeed. Nobody would have suspected it of him. He dealt with his enemies in the broad daylight, with the skies of heaven for his canopy, and thousands of his countrymen for his witnesses. His magnanimity put to shame their meanness. Their leader confessed his error, implored forgiveness, and then slunk into obscurity; glad to put the widest distance between himself and the scenes of his dastardly conspiracy.

If I am correct in these opinions, then there are two errors of the first concoction which render the new movement in all its forms utterly repugnant to the true principles of opponents of slavery in America. I mean the secret obligation, and the absence of moral foundation in the discrimination set up between men. The first subjects the right of private judgment absolutely to the will of an accidental majority. The second involves the bad and the good, the innocent and the guilty, the industrious and the idle, alike in one common fate, which no act of their own incurs or can avert. The fugitive Protestants from the persecutions of Louis the 14th, instigated by the bigotry of his Jesuit confessor, many of whom came to America, and left behind them names honored ever since as among those of the best citizens, would have fared worse, in their day, than the convicts sent to the colonies in order to relieve the mother country from a burden by transferring it to them. This is not justice, nor humanity, nor even sound political economy. Emigration is one of the great moral agencies which is doing more than ever was done in any former age to change the face of the world; which is spreading the light of Christianity into the dark and benighted regions of all its various continents; which is even now stretching civilization along the western coast of North America, as it did, in the last two centuries, on the eastern; which is vivifying the deserts of Australia; which is humanizing the barbarism of Africa; and which is wearing away the prejudices of caste, even among the petrified institutions of the East. The exclusive bigotry, which

seems now for the first time losing its hold in its remaining fastness, — the islands of Japan, — must not take its flight from there, only to settle down upon the banks of the Hudson or of the Mississippi, or to find a home upon the crests of the Alleghany or the Rocky Mountains. Such is the declaration of genuine philanthropy, which looks above the arbitrary and conventional demarcations of man's invention, and appeals to the mission of Christ as the great symbol of a revelation, that the good God above looks upon all men alike.

Upon no other foundation than this can the antislavery cause firmly repose. No aid nor true defenders can it obtain from among those who advocate proscription of any kind, merely on account of difference of race. The men who assumed that defence did it in behalf of a people originally torn from their native land, and brought to this against their will, who have ever since been deprived by force, not merely of civil rights, official distinctions, and social privileges, but of the fruits of their own labor, and of the secure enjoyment of their domestic affections. How can they continue their exertions, and, at the same time, countenance any other form of proscription bearing the remotest analogy to that of which they complain? How can they say to-day, that the slave-holder is a tyrant, who puts his heel on the neck of his slave, only because God made him of a different color from his own, and set him in Africa instead of in Europe; and to-morrow build a wall between themselves and others of their fellow-men, because God placed them, at the time of their birth, somewhere else than in the United States?

And, if this claim to establish an invidious distinction, abridging the rights of others, be a pretension to exercise an odious power, how much more revolting does it look when connected with an adjuration of the Divine Being to curse those who fail to keep their hostile schemes secret from the objects of their persecution! Can it be possible that the native sons of America, proud of their liberty to say before the world what they honestly think, without being called to account for

it by king or people, in their sovereign capacity; proud of their unpurchasable freedom of the press; proud of possessing the only asylum to which the persecuted for conscience' sake may fly, and find safety from the despotisms of the old world; they who, but a few months since, with one loud shout, demanded at the hand of the Austrian monarch the person of Martin Koszta, although he had no rights of nativity, nor even those of adopted citizenship, but merely because he had declared his intention to become an American, and who got him too; — can it be possible, I say, that they are insensible to the ridicule, if nothing worse, of going into secret conclave, like the conspirators who could not get rid of Julius Cæsar and his tyranny in any other way, to do with mystery, and in an indirect, ungenerous manner, what they may, if they choose, do openly and boldly? And, upon the top of this inconsistency, to shut out of their company all of their brethren, who, though they may even agree with them in their exclusive policy, and approve their measures, yet, because they feel a scruple about the propriety of secret obligations, must be rejected from all confidence and public trust, — this, it would seem, should open the eyes, at least, of those opponents of slavery who have enrolled themselves in the crusade, to the utterly unjustifiable and unworthy character of the position they have chosen to occupy. Let them remember, that the record they make now in the annals of the nation is that which will go down in immediate contrast with the honorable story of their fathers. Its errors and faults, its weakness and its meanness, will stand in vivid contrast with their wisdom and their heroism, their manliness and their truth.

The last consideration which I propose now to submit to the opponents of slavery who are in that order, is a practical one, drawn from the reminder that they have once more placed themselves in the same relative position towards slaveholders which they heretofore occupied in the old parties, and from which they strove to escape by renouncing them.

If a greater latitude of individual opinion be allowed them, and the mere fact that they are opponents of slavery is not so absolute a bar to personal advancement as in the former case, it should be remembered, on the other hand, that they were not then bound by any obligation to suppress all public remonstrance against the action of the majority, or to comply with their will, even where they strongly disapprove what is decided upon. In both cases, the determination not to make slavery a test in the selection of candidates for public confidence is the same. In both is the same disposition to interpose the national shield for the protection of the slave-power in the federal government. Slaveholders may come in, with all their extreme and aggressive spirit, and may push their peculiar policy within the order just as vigorously as they have done in old parties, perhaps with additional effect through the secrecy which is insured to their means of operation. They may wield exactly the same means of deciding between opposing interests, and rival aspirants for public honors, among the citizens of the free states, in favor of those who will promise the greatest fidelity to them. And what have antislavery men better to hope from this experiment than from all those which have gone before it, and failed? What more than to be outvoted by a skilful resort to divisions among themselves, and at last to find it necessary to secede again, or quietly to remain, and submit to be ruled? In the meanwhile, however, how much ground will have been lost by the vain and impotent experiment! how much of consistency and of self-respect, the very marrow of all moral power in the great struggles of life, will have been sacrificed!

For it should ever be borne in mind, as I said at the beginning, that we are under the dominion of an overpowering necessity, which makes the slave-question more and more a matter of national concern. The light of every day's sun shines upon new hundreds of beings who go to swell the causes of difference that already exist in far too great num-

bers. There is not a moment even of truce which leaves things as it found them. The revolution of each year places the parties to this contention in a changed relation of loss or gain to that which they held at its beginning, which makes their labors harder or easier for the next. The incidental circumstances which from time to time come in to disturb or to delay may, indeed, be only temporary; but they are serious taxes upon the strength of a new generation, which will accomplish with difficulty what the present might have done with ease. We all understand, that, before such a question, the duration of man's life is nothing. It is *the* question of human liberty, not in America only, but all over the world; and no earthly power can prevent a decision of it, for good or for evil, at some time or other, in this land. Silence is itself a power which will, before long, determine it, and determine it wrong; for it is in silence that the slave-influence grows the fastest, and intrenches itself the deepest. Aggressive it cannot help being, if it would. It is from the strong positions thus secured that now it is meditating new inroads upon the political strength of the free states. It is spreading its nets over the territories that stretch to the broad ocean of the West. It is scheming for the acquisition of the Antilles. It is colonizing the lands on the Spanish Main. It is not without hopes of re-opening the horrors of the middle passage, and introducing more foreigners, about whose rights, however, there will be no cause of complaint given to the native American. Nothing but open, energetic, loud-spoken resistance will do to prevent all this from becoming the settled policy of the nation. It must be early, too, and vigilant; for the victories of the slave-power are always gained at last by surprise, and when the citizens of the free states are the most unheeding. Above all, it must be *united*. Never was there a time when union of all the true, disinterested friends of the country was more imperatively demanded than now. I care not what the names by which they designate their public action. And this not so much to destroy slavery, as to

defend freedom; not to weaken the Union, but to make it more lasting; not to annul the Constitution, but to keep in it the only principles which can really make it live. Such a union is attainable but by one method which will make it truly effective, the same which has ever carried all great enterprises to success. I mean by close adherence to *one idea.* Much as this course has been censured by the designing, or ridiculed by the thoughtless, it needs no demonstration to establish its wisdom. Surely the Apostle Paul was not a bad exemplar, when he charged the faithful at Philippi, that they "stand fast *in one spirit, with one mind,* striving *together* for the faith of the gospel." The same injunction is imperative upon all good men now. The times are yet propitious. The country has been moved as never before. The ears of the people are open to hear and to receive. Let *us,* then, likewise "stand fast *in one spirit,* with *one mind,* striving *together* for the faith" of freedom.

Am I asked what I desire to see done? The answer is plain. I would have the people do no injury to the slaveholder, rob him of none of his rest, nor harm a hair of his head, or of any of those who are dear to him. But I would have them do all that is possible to deprive him of the power of harm to the country or to them. To this end, it seems indispensable that he be dislodged from the strongholds in the federal government. Neither he, nor any one that he will select, should be made President of the United States, or be placed in any other situation of responsibility in which he could avail aught to prevent an entire reversal of the policy which has, for a long time back, been prompted to promote his peculiar interests. Instead of perpetuating and extending slavery, every effort should be directed to the great object of releasing the general government from all responsibility for it or connection with it. The *word* should not be seen in the statute-book. The *thing* should not be known where the national flag waves over national territory. The seat of government should not be dishonored by its presence.

The free states should be secure from its encroachments. And upon no consideration whatever should any extension of the slave-power in the councils of the Union, by the introduction of new states subject to its influence, be permitted.

This is the answer to the second question which I proposed at the opening, — How is slavery to be treated on the part of the free states? Let it be left exclusively to the management of those who are responsible for its existence within the states where it is to be found; but let it be a burden upon no one outside. More than this, antislavery men, with all their abhorrence of the wrong, do not demand. Short of this, nothing will avail for their own security at home. It will not abolish slavery directly; but it will maintain and perpetuate freedom as the universal rule, which may lead, in the end, to voluntary emancipation, as the result of the convictions of slaveholders themselves. To this task, then, we must address ourselves. Difficult as it seems to execute, to earnest minds and steady hearts, animating a strong will, it may verify the lesson of the poet, —

> "Walls of brass resist not
> A noble undertaking; nor can vice
> Raise any bulwark to make good the place
> Where virtue seeks to enter."

My friends, we seek no ignoble objects or selfish ends. Let those contend who will for the temporary honors which the people will confer on those who please them best. The ambition to deserve them is not a mean nor a discreditable incentive to exertion. But there is an aspiration higher than that. It is to strive to do that people good even against their will; whilst admiring their virtues, not to be slow to point out their faults; to awaken their sleeping conscience, even though they may not bless, at the moment, the faithful sentinel for doing only his duty. Such be *our* province. The glory of contributing to save America from becoming the greatest nursery of slaves which the world has ever seen,

were it even to be attained at the price of a crown of thorns, would shed from every drop of blood of each separate wound it made, a ray of purer lustre than could come from the most sparkling gems that ever graced a monarch's brow. Let us strive, with all our might, in the faith that a peaceful triumph may sooner or later yield us this abundant reward.